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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, kicked off an effort to deliver hundreds of phone cards to soldiers in Iraq in time for them to call their loved ones on Father's Day.

During an all-school assembly on Monday, fifth- and sixth-graders at Highcrest Middle School in Wilmette joined with leaders from SBC and AT&T to help kick off the "Phone Calls for Father's Day" project. Highcrest students presented Kirk with 130 phone cards and more than \$1,000 raised in one week to support the project.

Joining Kirk at the assembly was Superintendent Glenn "Max" McGee, Principal Cathy Rosen and SBC Illinois President Carrie Hightman.

"Highcrest students are making sure many of our dads in uniform will be able to call home for Father's Day," Kirk said. "We owe a great deal to thousands of fathers and mothers serving their country overseas. These cards will allow our soldiers to make a free international call home to mom and the kids."

During the assembly, Major Jerry Clark, U.S. Army, called from Balad, Iraq to personally thank the students. Hightman also presented Kirk with 500 phone cards donated by SBC. AT&T donated 250 cards to send to troops in Iraq. There are more than 2,100 members of the Illinois Army Guard and 100 members of the Illinois Air Guard deployed overseas in places such as Afghanistan, South Korea, Iraq and Germany. Since Sept. 11, 2001, the Illinois National Guard mobilized more than 7,000 service members for deployment overseas.

"As a sailor who deployed overseas, I can report that nothing boosts your morale more than the voices of your family," said Kirk. "The students of Highcrest, along with SBC, AT&T and all those contributing to this project are providing a much-needed boost to our brave Americans in uniform serving across the globe."